

Home of Patience Wright
Bordentown, Burlington County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Home of Patience Wright
Bordentown, Burlington County, New Jersey

Owner: The First National Bank of Bordentown

Date of Erection: Middle Eighteenth Century

Architect:

Builder: Probably Joseph Borden

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: Two and one-half

Materials of Construction: Foundation - brick

Exterior walls - brick

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - pitch with dormers

Historical Data:

According to tradition this house was occupied before the Revolutionary War by Joseph Wright and his wife Patience. Patience was the daughter of Quaker parents; she was born Patience Lovell. On March 20, 1748 she married Joseph Wright, a man considerably older than she; he died in 1769 leaving her with three children. It appears that she had a certain facility for modeling in wax and was known at this time for her wax portraits. She went to London and opened an exhibition room in Cockspur Street in 1772. Here she made figures, busts, and historic groups. Her work achieved a remarkable vogue. The king

and queen visited her to watch her work. According to her own account she addressed the king and queen by their Christian names - George and Charlotte. She was an ardent patriot, and it appears she offended the king considerably by telling him what she thought about his conduct in connection with the colonies. It has always been assumed that she was a spy for the colonies, although there is no particular proof for this.

In 1781 she visited Paris making busts and figures of notables. She wrote to Washington in 1783 asking for permission to make a wax bust of a cast of him made by her son. She was also in correspondence with Jefferson on the question of making wax figures of important American men. She died, however, in 1786 before she could make her contemplated trip to America.

Of her three children, Joseph, her only son, achieved quite a bit of fame in his own right. He was born in 1756, probably spending his early years at the house at Bordentown. He was a portrait painter and die-sinker. He is supposed to have been a secret American agent operating in Europe during the Revolutionary War. Joseph studied with John Trumbull under Benjamin West in London. In 1780 he was exhibiting at the Royal Academy. In 1782 he went to Paris, and late in that same year sailed from Nantes for America. He was shipwrecked on the way, but finally arrived in Boston bearing letters of introduction from Franklin and others. He had a letter to Washington, and came to visit him when he was at Rocky Hill, painting his portrait there in 1783. The following year, he painted the portrait of Washington in full military uniform.

During 1783-4 he lived in Philadelphia. He moved to New York in 1787 and married Miss Vandervort, a niece of the Revolutionary hero Colonel William Ledyard. Through the influence of Washington he was appointed as the first draftsman and die-sinker of the newly created United

States mint in 1792, and was probably the designer of the first coins. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia both he and his wife died.

Wagee in his history of Bordentown unqualifyingly says that this is the Wright house, and local tradition supports him in his statement, but a search of the records in the Secretary of State's Office at Trenton furnish no proof of this statement. According to the Trenton records William Penn et als., on March 1, 1676 gave to Mahlon Stacy "10 full equal and undivided 1/19 parts of 90 full equal and undivided 1/100 parts of all that tract of land in New Jersey called West New Jersey." In January, 1677, Thomas Farnsworth acquired 1/15 part of Mahlon Stacy's property.

The next record is a transfer of Susanna Farnsworth to Samuel Farnsworth in 1706. Susanna was the widow of Thomas. From Samuel Farnsworth the property passed to Joseph Borden March 23, 1723-24. There are recorded several other transfers from different members of the Farnsworth family to Borden. Borden in his will of 1763 gave to his daughter Amy Potts "the house where David Thomas now lives, and also the house where David Price now lives."

In 1799 John Elton, sheriff, transferred the property to William Norcross. There was a house upon the property transferred; it is mentioned in the indenture. The property remained in the Norcross family until 1820 when it came into the possession of a Thomas Potter. There are fifteen transfers recorded in little over one hundred years. The present owners acquired title in July, 1932.

From the search of the title in the Secretary of State's Office and the County Clerk's Office at Mt. Holly, there is no evidence of the house ever having been owned by Joseph Wright. In the will of 1763,

Joseph Borden mentions the occupants of the two houses willed to his daughter Amy Potts. Joseph Wright died in 1769 and if the Wrights occupied the house at all, it must have been in the period between 1763-1769.

Bibliography:

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Malone, Dumas)
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Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1936
(See article on Patience Wright by Adeline
Adams and article on Joseph Wright by
Dorothy Graffy)

A search of records in the Secretary of
State's Office made by Robert M. Falcey,
Mercer County Office

A search of Burlington County Court Records
made by F. A. Eckhart and Betty R. Bishop,
Burlington County Office



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Approved:



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 8/30/57